



## Enjoying Dunster's Surroundings

### Out and About

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Within a few miles of historic Dunster you have the stunning countryside of the Exmoor National Park. This large, beautiful and peaceful area of wild countryside in the South West of England was designated in 1954 and covers 267 square miles. Two thirds of the park is in Somerset and the landscape is described as 'semi-natural' as it has been influenced by human activity over thousands of years. The Park has a diverse range of habitats with wild upland moors, wooded valleys and farmland, where the wild Exmoor ponies and famous Red Deer roam the hills and vales and buzzards and red kites fly above you. The area's abundance of village pubs supply a varied and wholesome range of foods, many including terrific local produce.

### The Local Coastline

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The spectacular coastline of West Somerset is rich with cliffs, beaches and harbours to while away your visit. You can enjoy the local ales and cream teas after your walk or cycle ride through this magnificent area of England.

The coastline of Exmoor National Park has stunning views as well as coastal paths of varying degrees of difficulty for walkers, riders and mountain bikers. Minehead, just 2 miles from Dunster, is the start of the great Southwest Coastal Path - some 630 miles to Poole in Dorset. There are long sandy beaches, coves and inlets for relaxing on or to do a little sea-fishing from the beach or by boat. You can also explore the coastline on the longest steam train track in the south west. Check out the events at West Somerset Railway, stopping at villages en route from the sea. There's one station on the outskirts of Dunster itself.



One of our favourite hidden gems is the little port of Porlock Weir. Just a few miles down the coast, this tiny harbor, with its picturesque fishermen's cottages, is at the end of a long sweeping bay. The elements show their impact on the ageing wood of the breakers and the



smiling face on the WWII pill box now it has begun tipping over.

## Exmoor Safaris

You might choose to explore the inspiring landscapes and encounter the wonderful wildlife of Exmoor in the comfort of a 4x4, enjoying the views of an Exmoor safari with one of the experienced guides. You may even get the chance to discover the Exmoor Red Deer, Roe Deer and endangered Exmoor ponies in the own, wonderfully rugged environment. A typical safari lasts approximately 2½ hours and provides a unique way to enjoy the inspiring scenery, diverse wildlife and heritage of this wonderful landscape.

## Golf



If golf is your pleasure you can visit the friendly and ever-welcoming Minehead & West Somerset Golf Club and play throughout the year on this links/parkland course. Dating back to the late 1800s, this is the oldest golf course in Somerset. It is 6,264 yards in total and is a par 72. Club hire, lessons and meals are always available.

## Exmoor Dark Skies

For thousands of years, people have gazed up at the night sky and wondered what is out there. Sadly, dark night skies are a declining resource, threatened by development and the effects of intrusive artificial lighting. Exmoor National Park is now designated as an International Dark Sky Reserve, the first in Europe! A view of the stars is a view of our natural heritage and a spectacular quality of Exmoor's night time landscape. Sky watching is a year-round activity made even more spectacular if you take some binoculars out with you and if you can go on a clear evening when there is very little or no moonlight. March and April are excellent months for observing in the UK while the late summer and autumn months give the best chance of seeing a shooting star. All year round there's a chance you may also glimpse the international space station; it's like a bright star moving gently through the sky. Well worth looking out for.

## West Somerset Railway



The railway, which has a station in Dunster, is a true country branch line of the old Great Western Railway and is full of fascination whether you are looking for a nostalgic ride back in time through lovely countryside or the chance to study the railway and industrial heritage which the line preserves. The historic steam locomotives, coaches and wagons, plus the buildings of ten unique stations linked by a twenty-mile scenic journey, will repay hours of exploration. The surrounding countryside is as varied as it is beautiful. The gently rolling Quantock hills and distant Exmoor, unspoilt villages and farms nestling in leafy lanes, the cliffs and coast of the Bristol Channel with views of distant South-Wales, confident church towers, Dunster's imposing Castle and Minehead's seaside charm. All are some of our nearby gems just waiting to be discovered.



There are toilets on each train. Disabled persons' accessible toilets are available at Bishops Lydeard, Crowcombe Heathfield, Stogumber Watchet and Minehead stations.

The West Somerset Railway can carry passengers in wheelchairs in their trains. Please let them know as space is limited and you can book your seats in advance on 01643 700384. Disabled toilets are available in the Lorna Doone carriage which can be booked in advance.

Dogs are welcome on service trains and are charged £2.00 per dog. There is a buffet car on most of the trains selling a variety of light refreshments, a large number of which are locally produced.

### The Parish and Priory Church of St George

This church, a Grade 1 listed building, is one of Dunster's best kept secrets and should not be missed. The records show an early church on this site was "re-built" soon after 1066 so if history is your thing, this is definitely a place to visit. In 1090, the Norman Lord of Dunster gave land to the





monks of Bath and they built a Benedictine Abbey here. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the church was used so much by both the monks and parishioners, that a church court in Glastonbury had to rule on who could use it and when. Matters were finally resolved when the vicar and parishioners paid for, and built, a physical divide inside the church with a separate choir for the parish. A rich history adorns every corner of this lovely church including:

- ∞ The arms of King Charles II dating from his visit to Dunster Castle in May 1645
- ∞ 3 wooden chests including one from the reign of our 12th century King Stephen, a grandson of William the Conqueror.
- ∞ Stunning Tudor floor tiles. (Look out for both the Tudor rose and the fleur-de-lis in the pattern. Remember Henry VIII was King of France as well as King of England and King of Ireland.)
- ∞ Carved fan-vaulted Rood Screen, possibly the longest in the world at 54 feet.
- ∞ The font dating back to 1530, in the reign of Henry VIII, depicting the Passion of Jesus Christ.

## Dunster Castle

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There's been a castle at Dunster for over 1,000 years. It began life as a Saxon stronghold and developed into a spacious and comfortable Victorian home. It was home to the Luttrell family for 600 years and when the family moved out in 1976, the National Trust took over and now does a magnificent job of safeguarding this wonderful building for generations to come.

The entrance is just yards from the hotel and offers a range of fascinating things to visit and enjoy including the castle itself, its wonderful gardens with 3 bridges over the River Avill, the amazing banana trees and Giant Redwoods to the fully working watermill and, of course, the Trust's lovely tea room.

## Dunster's Tithe Barn

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The 14<sup>th</sup> century tithe barn is another of the village's Grade 2 listed buildings. The magnificent double doors on the east front are heavy oak and although much of the barn has been altered over the years, it remains a gorgeous building. A tithe was a tax levied on everyone in the parish and it amounted to one tenth of everyone's income. If cash was a problem, people could pay with the crops they grew and these goods were stored inside the tithe barn. In 1535 the annual income of the barn is recorded as being the equivalent of £37.23 and this was passed on to the priory in Bath. The barn is adjacent to the church so just a few minutes from the Dunster Castle Hotel.



### The Medieval Dovecote

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Another Grade 2 listed building, the Dunster Dovecote was probably built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was originally owned by Dunster Priory and served a vital purpose for the monks. During harsh winters, food was a scarce resource, partly due to the fact that animal feed ran out and many animals were slaughtered before the long, harsh winter months. The dovecote ensured a year-round supply of pigeon as it contains about 500 nesting boxes reached by a ladder (which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was re-built to revolve). The Luttrell family bought the dovecote after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and so the supply of squab (young) and adult pigeons fed the family at the castle after that date.

### Cleeve Abbey

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Just a few miles from Dunster (and close to Washford station on the West Somerset Railway) is another of Somerset's historic jewels, Cleeve Abbey. This Cistercian Abbey gives today's visitor the chance to explore 15<sup>th</sup> century buildings, 13<sup>th</sup> century heraldic tiles and catch a glimpse of monastic life 800 years ago. The monks' dormitory is one of the finest remaining in Britain and the older cloister is still enclosed on all four sides. Run by English Heritage, Cleeve Abbey offers plenty for today's visitor to enjoy.

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*As you can see, you have picked a rich landscape in which to spend some time. Whatever you choose to do in Dunster, we hope you enjoy the best that Somerset has to offer.*



*John, Lisa and the team at  
Dunster Castle Hotel*